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ABSTRACT

Ways that colleges and universities might respond to a period of fiscal problems are addressed. It is suggested that larger trends must be examined to understand the present situation that bureaucracy and expertise are on the defensive, and that major integrated institutions--churches, parties, unions--are in decline. It is shown that there is now an opportunity to improve relationships between the college administration and faculty: financial problems may promote the formation of joint faculty administrative units and restructuring of administrator-faculty relationships. A possible solution to the problem of too expensive medical schools might be to act while fiscal stringency is severe to change the programs that could be discontinued or reduced. Professional schools could also benefit from policy analysis; they are very effective, but are also very costly. That is, the schools have high status in the universities and with employers, but the price per pupil is comparatively high. The problem is that across the spectrum of professional schools many of them are not good enough to be in universities, and they do not provide good enough professional training to serve external clientele. It is claimed that schools of criminology, welfare, and education are in trouble. An option is for the university to establish a general school of advanced and applied social sciences. It is recommended that schools of education be restructured as centers of learning about learning and that they should be more involved in measuring learning in various courses. (SW)

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ON THE USES OF ADVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

My purpose in this paper is to suggest that risk is opportunity, that just as there have been advantages on the way up, there are, if not equivalent, at least comparable advantages on the way down. If small is beautiful, then we are all going to have an opportunity to pretty ourselves up a bit. The way to enter the subject is not with itself, but by taking cognizance of larger trends in which all are implicated, so we will understand better how we got where we are. Given that we are passing through a period not only of fiscal stringency, but a period in which grave constitutional questions are being raised about the ability of our institutions to offer adequate responses, what should our institutions of higher education do? If universities take the view that they are hopeless, and helpless, that on the one hand they are deserving special privilege, that they have a special call on the public conscience, and on the other hand that it is quite impossible for them to give up anything because everything they do is simply of the utmost priority, not only for themselves but for society, they will become not the solution but the paradigm of the problem. Ask how much money your institution is going to have next year; then ask when was the last time you had that much money. You will discover that it was two or three or four years ago, not thirty or twenty or even ten years ago. By a creative act of will, you will imagine that your university stood, and you survived when you were that small before. Universities,

through a period of fiscal stringency, may come to realize their dependence on general economic progress in society and, therefore, behave accordingly. As centers of learning with essential responsibility for creating and testing new knowledge, we, above all, must try to make use of this new period with intelligence and insight so that we can take advantage of the real possibilities for change that exist in a period of declining financial resources.

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ON THE USES OF ADVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION*

> Sweet are the uses of adversity,
> which like the toad, ugly and
> venomous, wears yet a precious
> jewel in his head.
> -from "As You Like It"
> -William Shakespeare

You are I, we are not the poor, we are not the insulted, we are not the injured. Society owes us nothing whatsoever. We have no special claim on the sympathies of the public. I say this in order to clear the air, lest one thinks, especially faculty members and administrators, that they have some God-given mission to higher education. My purpose is to suggest that risk is opportunity, that just as there have been advantages on the way up, there are, if not equivalent, at least comparable advantages on the way down. If small is beautiful, then we are all going to have an opportunity to pretty ourselves up a bit.

Mary Douglas says that there are four decisive arguments in human relations: there is no time, it is unnatural, God prohibits it, and there is no money. The last one of these is available today for those who wish to be decisive with a purpose.

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*Transcript of a speech delivered at The University of Arizona, for the National Conference on Higher Education Finance (December 4, 1981); and in Washington, D.C. for the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (March 2, 1982).

The way to enter the subject is not with itself, but by taking cognizance of larger trends in which all are implicated, so we will understand better how we got where we are. And then I will turn to a number of actual suggestions for handling long-time problems, about which everyone swears nothing can be done, that are now up for resolution and solution.

We are not alone. Bureaucrats and experts are on the defensive everywhere. If we would go to the classic work of Max Webber and ask what are the essential characteristics of a bureaucracy, of a hierarchy, there would be two: a monopoly of expertise and permanent tenure.

A monopoly of expertise, as we know, is long gone; but as early as 25 years ago, most of the expertise about large institutions resided in them. Most of the experts in higher education were in it. But this is not true anymore. In regard to policy analysis, there are rival teams of analysts who have been in the government, who claim to know as much as anybody who is doing the job now. If you are in highways, if you are in welfare, if you are in health or medicine, you know that the people who used to occupy that position are hiding in universities or think tanks or in state or local government or in special institutes--and that they are ready to challenge anything and everything.

On the one hand, society benefits because it has multiple sources of information. On the other hand, the incumbent does not benefit because there are so many smart people out there, people just like us, ready to take his or her place. Tenure, as you know, is being challenged. After all, tenure inheres in organizations; if they go, it goes. It is not merely that the monopoly of expertise has been lost and that tenure has been weakened, but that the knowledge base on which any hierarchy has to stake its claim has become contested.

I want to be clear here. It is not true, I believe, that you and I are dumber than the people we replaced, or that the people who preceded us were smarter than we are. Once I told somebody in retrospect that the social programs in the 1930s seemed so much better then the ones of the 60s. He put me down right away, and properly, by saying, "Yes, that's because we didn't have evaluation then."

The truth of the matter is that our knowledge grows incrementally; we are that much better educated, that much more competent; we have marginally that much better tools than the people who preceded us; but what we need to know has increased exponentially. If you think of big government as having large numbers of large programs, like spheres in this ballroom, the larger the number of programs, the more they are likely to collide, the more they are likely to bounce off one another, the more remote, the more varied, the more indirect the consequences, the more difficult to predict what is going to happen. It is not only that people know that government cannot do everything, that it cannot really reduce crime rates, that it does not improve your health very much, or even that education will not make you free, really. It is that the pace of growth has outstripped our capacity to comprehend. As new programs bounce off old ones, the consequences are more numerous, diverse, indirect, and remote then they were before. So it is perhaps not wholly unfortunate that at this point in time our society is trying to re-assess what it is doing.

If we look at the social side of what has happened, we see that all major American institutions that are hierarchal and that are integrated--in the sense of trying to combine views on a large number of issues across the spectrum--are weaker.

The presidency is weaker. Don't you remember that time, you're old enough, when we fought out questions of whether presidents should have more than two terms? Ever since, we have been trying to find presidents who would serve more than one.

It is not only that our political parties have grown weaker, but that we have done things deliberately to weaken them. Any textbook will tell you the main function of a party is to nominate candidates for office. If we proliferate primaries so that parties have no real opportunity to nominate candidates, is it any wonder that parties are weak? In the name of participation, we have national nominating conventions in which the result is ordained before they start. Citizens say, "What a ghastly choice!" Supporters say, "We have the world's most democratic system." Like, look Ma, no hands, no deliberation, no discussion, just an automatic vote, all in the name of direct democracy.

What lies behind this weakening of government is a desire to have organizations without authority. What are the consequences? If you ask people, "How do you like

your representative?", they love them! Eighty-five percent of Americans think their representatives are super. "How do you like Congress?", "Terrible place!". Ask the legislators themselves--"Are you more effective than you were before?" "Yes." "Are you more respected, are you on more committees, do you have a larger staff, are you of greater importance?" "Yes." "Is Congress more important?" "No." "How do you like dealing with your constituents?" "Wonderful." "How do you like Congress?" "Don't." If you ask on the budget side, do the individuals like the major higher income programs of government spending, most of them like most of these programs by a large majority. Do they like the totals to which these programs add up? No, they do not.

So far, we have two trends: one is that bureaucracy and expertise are on the defensive, and the other is that major integrated institutions--churches, parties, unions--are all in decline. This is the empirical pattern: the parts and the whole are out of whack. There is a

disjunction between what we do in our individual capacities and the collective consequences to which they add up. Nowhere is this more evident than in regard to spending.

The question of public spending is "Why does it keep going up?", not only up absolutely, but, since the second world war, going up and up in proportion to the gross national

product. There are two conspiracy theories, of course: the one on the left and the one on the right. The one on the left is called false consciousness, and the one on the right is called fiscal illusion. Fiscal illusion says that the people don't know the taxes they pay. In particular, perhaps, in general, I doubt it.

Now, false consciousness is harder to get at because it claims that we don't see our interests correctly. In one sense I believe this entirely, who sees their interests correctly? Who wouldn't change lots of things that they had done with better understanding? What I object to is not rejection of my claim that I know my own interests, but that there are others who know my interests better than I do.

If you want to reject conspiracy theories, including the idiot party that supports the notion that bureaucrats only work for each other and there is nothing in it to gain for society, how can we explain the growth in public spending? We can explain it by referring to what I have called the "Pogo principle"--you remember that comical character and the famous phrase of the Vietnam War to the effect that, "I have seen the enemy and they is us."

The reason government spending goes on the way it does is precisely because we the people want it. This is still a democracy. If people really object to the level of spending of these programs, what, over a period of years, has kept them from doing something about it?

Imagine that the theory of logrolling were extended to citizens. I want this, and you want that: How are we going to get together? One way is to fight. Why would we want to do that, we're such nice people? Why not add our proposals together? If everybody does this, an interesting dilemma occurs: everybody's terribly happy about each transaction; it is only the collective consequences that appear disastrous.

I call this budgeting by addition rather than by subtraction. Basically, for the last thirty years, requests have more or less been added together. The total is paid for by rising national income, when it was rising; by driving down defense (until last year, defense was the same in constant dollars as in 1955 and social welfare increased over two times), by inflation; by printing money; by higher taxes. Why need such nice people quarrel when they can pass on their costs to others?

Suppose we want to increase spending. There are two ways to do that: either mandate higher spending here and it will go up, or go to sleep, play Rip Van Winkle, and it will go up too. What are your costs of coordination? Zero. What are your costs of information? Zero.

Suppose you want spending to go down. If you are to do it on what we consider an intelligent item-by-item basis, not an irrational course of cutting across-the-board, you have to know about multitudes of programs. The cost of information is enormous. So is the cost of coordination. Why? Expenditure limitation is not worthwhile for anyone, unless everyone has to do it. There are only two people in the world who are for the public interest: you and I. The others are for their nasty private interests. And the public spirited people get together and say, "We're going to cut our budgets 50 percent." What happens? Everybody else says, there is more gravy and they dip their hands in. What is the end result? The society is no better off, spending is exactly the same. So what is the point in sacrifice? Now, if everybody had to do it together, so that you knew that everybody else was cut, then you might imagine that there would be some benefits from this vast reduction.

What are we going to do about it? At the federal level, there are efforts to introduce constitutional spending limits, or to have Congress itself establish binding ceilings. How much? I'll not talk about them here. Basically, what they suggest is that government spending on the federal level be limited to the increased growth of the national product. The idea is to put up a ceiling so that everybody has to sacrifice. More for one means less for another.

What is important here is not to debate that question, which is not my topic, but to show that a constitutional difficulty is now receiving a constitutional discussion. The problem is not merely that you and I differ, or that we don't like the outcome in one area or another, but across the board of public policy, and across the board of our institutions, people find that their individual actions, however appropriate in their context, do not add up to desirable collective results.

Given that we are passing through a period not only of fiscal stringency, but a period in which grave constitutional questions are being raised about the ability of our institutions to offer adquate responses, what should our institutions of higher education do? I discovered in teaching courses, that at whatever level, graduate or freshman, when asked to discuss the basis of influence or power or control in society, knowledge is the last thing the students ever think of. Yet universities ought to be knowledge-creating and knowledge-testing institutions "par excellence."

If universities take the view that they are hopeless, and helpless, that on the one hand they are deserving special privilege, that they have a special call on the public conscience, and on the other hand that it is quite impossible for them to give up anything because everything

they do is simply of the utmost priority, not only for themselves but for society, they will become not the solution but the paradigm of the problem. Therefore, I think those of us in higher education have some special responsibility to ourselves to take a more skeptical view of the subject.

First, a little bit of hope, or at least an exercise in trying to make the situation not appear worse than it is. I call it the retrospective method. Ask how much money your institution is going to have next year; then ask when was the last time you had that much money. You will discover that it was two or three or four years ago, not thirty or twenty or even ten years ago. By a great creative act of will, you will imagine that your university stood, and you survived when you were that small before.

My main purpose is to bring up five areas in which we can convert obstacles into opportunities. You will all think of many more, because you have more experience than I in this matter. How many years before coming here did you talk with your friends and say, "If only I could do this," and "If only we could do that."?

Your answer was that everybody was perfectly comfortable the way they were. There were so many vested interests; this institute was growing; and that one has more grants and the third one was subsidized by the government. How can we get them out of their appointed paths?

This exercise in recall enables us to ask, "What is it we used to want?". What is it that we would have liked to change in quality if not in quantity?

A question on which there is endless complaint in universities is that relations between administration and faculty are estranged. There has been an enormous growth in administration, phalanx among phalanx, layer upon layer; the space people don't care about the substance of what you do; the personnel people don't care about who you need; the listing of complaints goes on and on. There is "bitching and backbiting" but nothing ever happens. Now, in this period of stringency, I suspect we will begin to see signs of the interpenetration of faculty and administration. On what grounds? On the grounds of one of life's conclusive rationales: there is no money, the ground that is always so powerful, the ground of necessity. With a smaller administration, joint faculty-administrative units are just on the horizon. If you bring the faculty people in, they are going to say, "Who the hell wants to do all this." And if you bring the administrative people in, they don't want to hear about nit-picking faculty complaints. There is now an opportunity to restructure these relationships; if things get better financially, you will not have this opportunity again.

Next I am going to deal with two professional schools, medical schools and schools of public policy and policy analysis. There are too many medical schools and they are too expensive. Everybody knows this and nobody can do anything about it. But you can do something about it. If you cannot, it is because you have too much money, you are not hurting enough, you are not bleeding enough, it is only a sign that you have lots more to give. Take my beloved state of California. If we put up fences around the state to keep doctors out, they would burrow their way in. Moreover, when you wean them off the public purse, those people can find work. What claims do they have on citizen sympathy in terms of lack of opportunity?

A lot could be done in many states where they have excess hospitals; I don't mean that it is easy, and I think

I do understand as a life-long political scientist the political connections of doctors, the prestige involved, and all the rest of it. While the time is right, while stringency is severe, we ought to act so as to change the programs we would have liked to abandon or scale down long ago.

Now for a microanalysis closer to home: professional schools and policy analysis. I think, prejudiced as I am, that schools of public policy have been one of the better developments in the last number of years. From a cost-effectiveness point of view, the schools are very effective; but they are also very costly. By effective I mean everybody is working; the schools have high status in the universities and high status with employers. By costly, I mean that the price per pupil of this intensive education is comparatively high.

The problem is that across the spectrum of professional schools, there is a lot of dissatisfaction. They are not good enough to be in universities, many of them, and they do not provide good enough professional training to serve external clientele. Schools of criminology, of welfare, of education, on and on, are in trouble.

If there are creative deans and vice chancellors around, the crisis of the professional school also provides an opportunity. The problem is lack of knowledge; some schools don't know enough to devote an entire curriculum to teaching their students. What might be done? The university would establish a general school of advanced and applied social sciences. It would offer a general form of analytic education. The core program would consist of policy analysis applied to whatever subject matter speciality students were interested in. Specific "area study" elements would be cut down; students would take a year-long required course in whatever educators, welfare people, criminologists think they have to tell them. Of course, there would be internships for on-the-job training. Thus we could train larger numbers of students at less cost and at the same time improve the quality of education.

Universities should take learning seriously. Institutions of higher education do less evaluation than any other kind of place I know. There are elementary schools that do a lot more of it. What do we really know about what anybody learns in higher education? Oh, we know something about the subject matter taught, but how effective are various modes of teaching at the university level? We know the input, but what of the output? We could say, go to Stanford, a business degree is worth so many thousands of dollars a year for the first job. But that doesn't tell us anything about what a student learns.

Given the experiences of the last quarter-century, I think it is time to move away from pathology and towards help, that is, from concern with people who cannot learn, to concern with those who are not supposed to learn but actually do. There is at least some work going on to get at the good teachers, to get at the good principals, to start modeling how good learning takes place.

I see two developments: one, a resurrection of schools of education as centers of learning about learning, and, two, efforts to measure learning in various courses. For example, we might see if, in a certain elementary course, computer-assisted instruction might not do quite as well or better than you or I--Who knows? It's all rumor. Now we have some people come around and give the professor a form and the students a form. I used that service and learned from it. We get evaluated essentially because we want to. But it is not the same as measuring the content of what students know, before and after.

What do students know six months later, a year later, two years later? If there is no retention, why are we doing this? These are very serious issues, which go to the heart of the enterprise, that are rarely discussed because people are too polite; it's too threatening. Just like social psychologists rarely mention the relationship between attitude and action--lest we discover that the relationship is so poor as to call into question the basic method of the enterprise, so, too, the last subject of study in the academy is learning. Those of you who have rage in your hearts, who are revolutionaries deep down inside, may save up for this one.

It is possible, finally, that a severe enough period of financial stringency could lead to a somewhat greater emphasis in universities on the creation, rather than the distribution of wealth. Very few resources in the university are concerned with the question of wealth creation.

We have a remarkable phenomena in our churches today. They identify with those people who have less of the goods of this world than others. Their concern is redistribution, as if the wealth were already there. The churches think it comes from heaven. They must know wealth is there because they see it on television. But from what they put out, you would assume that no country in the world has any difficulty raising their standard of living. The only "real" problems apparently involve taking something from some people and giving it to others.

If, as I suspect, numerous states and the federal government enact fairly stringent measures to limit public spending to the increase of the size of the economy, we are going to see a change. Instead of spokesmen for poor people talking to someone, saying, "Why don't you act like a social worker; why don't you pat kids on the head; why don't you give out toys at Christmas?," they are going to stop this nonsense and are going to say, "Get off your butts, go out to work and produce. If you don't produce, we can't distribute." Fiscal stringency may connect distribution with production. And thus, we may get a greater balance to this country, between a concern for production, from which, after all, independence comes, and a concern for distribution.

On the campus, in the business schools, we will also have to change, because, basically, they train you how to make it into corporations, how to read the entrails of corporate accounts. They do not really talk about the creation of wealth, because like the other schools, they assume it is already there.

Universities, through a period of fiscal stringency, may come to realize their dependence on general economic progress in society and, therefore, behave accordingly.

My message is twofold: one is that our joint difficulties are part-and-parcel of trends in society. ⟷ The denigration of expertise, the disintegration of hierarchical authority, the endless cacophony of criticism of established institutions, we share with many others. The second part of the message is that as centers of learning with essential responsibility for creating and testing new knowledge, we, above all, must try to make use of this new period, not with hurrahs and hallelujahs, but with intelligence and insight so that we can take advantage of the real possibilities for change that exist in a period of declining financial resources.

Your own university is probably different. It may be subject to a lot or a little financial stringency. Parts of it may still be affluent while others are poorer. As a general rule, the worse the stringency, the better the disposition to seek analysis (even taking old ones off the shelf) and do something about it. Organizations have to be below the level required to keep past activities going before they will consider politically painful alternatives. For many purposes, there may be too much stringency; for encouraging radical reform (or abolition) of programs believed to be bad, stringency may be too small.